

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 02773 041047Z

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SUBJECT: MULKIRIGALA BY-ELECTION

REF: COLOMBO 2315

1. SUMMARY: MULKIRIGALA BY-ELECTION WILL BE HELD AUGUST 27 TO FILL ASSEMBLY VACANCY CAUSED BY THE DEATH OF FORMER HEALTH AND FISHERIES MINISTER GEORGE RAJAPAKSE. HIS MARXIST-LEANING ELDER BROTHER, LAKSHMAN, HAS BEEN GIVEN RULING PARTY'S TICKET IN SPITE OF HIS BECOMING PARTY MEMBER ONLY FOR THE OCCASION, OPPOSITION CANDIDATE IS LOCALLY POPLAR LONG-TIME PARTY WORKER. POLITICAL OBSERVERS CURRENTLY RATE OUTCOME A TOSS-UP WITH BOTH PARTIES CLAIMING CONFIDENTLY THEY WILL WIN. 11,360 NEW AND MAINLY YOUTHFUL VOTERS IN TOTAL ELECTORATE OF 57,230 WILL HAVE STRONG INFLUENCE ON ELECTION'S OUTCOME. NEITHER OF TWO INDEPENDENTS IS GIVEN A CHANCE. HOWEVER, ONE IS YOUNGER RAJAPAKSE BROTHZT, WHO MAY SIPHON OFF SOME VOTES FROM GOVERNMENT CANDIDATE. END SUMMARY.

2. NOMINATIONS WERE FILED JULY 29 FOR MULKIRIGALA BY-ELECTION SCHEDULED AUGUST 27. SEAT BECAME VACANT THROUGH DEATH OF FORMER MINISTER OF FISHERIES AND HEALTH GEORGE RAJAPAKSE WHO HAD HELD SEAT SINCE MARCH 1960
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PAGE 02 COLOMB 02773 041047Z

(REFTEL) . NOMINEES ARE LAKSHMAN RAJAPAKSE (GEORGE'S

ELDER BROTHER) FOR RULING SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP); T. DON FRANCIS, FOR OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP); AND TWO INDEPENDENTS, NEIL RAJAPAKSE (GEORGE RAJAPAKSE'S YOUNGER BROTHER) AND S.W. RAJAPAKSE A DISTANT RELATIVE OF ALL THE OTHER RAJAPAKSES. NEITHER INDEPENDENT IS GIVEN A CHANCE TO WIN.

3. BY-ELECTION IS IN TRADITIONALLY MORE RADICAL, LEFTIST SOUTHERN AREA OF SRI LANKA WHICH SHOULD GIVE SLFP SLIGHT EDGE. GEORGE RAJAPAKSE WON SEAT IN MAY 1970 ELECTIONS WITH ALMOST 6,000 VOTE MAJORITY. HOWEVER ELECTORAL TREND HAS BEEN TOWARD UNP WITH ITS NINE WINS IN ELEVEN BY-ELECTIONS SINCE 1970 ELECTIONS FOR NET GAIN OF FOUR SEATS. POLITICAL OBSERVERS PRESENTLY RATE CONTEST A TOSS-UP. SLFP IS BANKING ON SYMPATHY VOTE FOR CANDIDATE'S LATE BROTHER WHO WAS POPULAR POLITICAL FIGURE, RAJAPAKSE FAMILY NAME, AS WELL AS PRESTIGE GARNERED FROM AUGUST NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT CONFERENCE TO UPULL IT THROUGH. UNP FEELS ANTI-GOVERNMENT VOTE, PLUS ITS LOCALLY POPULAR CANDIDATE WHO HAS RUN FOR SEAT AND LOST THREE TIMES IN SUCCESSION, WILL GIVE IT VICTORY IN USUALLY HOSTILE TERRITORY. OUTCOME WILL DEPEND GREATLY ON WHICH WAY THE 11,360 NEW VOTERS, MOSTLY YOUTHS, PARTICIPATING FOR FIRST TIME IN ELECTIONS, WILL SWING. THERE ARE 57,230 ELIGIBLE VOTERS.

4. LAKSHMAN RAJAPAKSE IS VETERAN POLITICIAN WHO ENTERED FIRST CEYLONese PARLIAMENT AFTER INDEPENDENCE IN 1947 AS INDEPENDENT. A POLITICAL WANDERER, HE LATER JOINED THE COMMUNIST PARTY, SWITCHED TO THE TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMAJA PARTY IN THE 1952 ELECTIONS AND LOST. HE LATER JOINED BREAKAWAY MARXIST PHILIP GUNAWARDEN'S NAHAJANA EKSATH PERAMUNA (MEP) AND HAS STAYED WITH IT UNTIL HIS RECENT CONVERSION TO THE SLFP. HE WON IN THE 1946 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND IN THE TWO 1960 ELECTIONS. HE LOST IN 1965 AND 1970. HIS POLITICAL VIEWS ARE DEFINITELY MARXIST.

5. NEIL RAJAPAKSE, THE YOUNGER RAJAPAKSE BROTHER, IS SAID TO BE BACKED BY SLFP ELEMENTS PARTICULARLY THE SLFP YOUTH LEAGUES, WHO RESENT LAKSHMAN RAJAPAKSE'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 COLOMB 02773 041047Z

BEING GIVEN THE PARTY TICKET ALTHOUGH HE HAS BEEN A LONG-TIME MEP WORKER. NEIL IS ALSO REPORTEDLY SUPPORTED BY GEORGE RAJAPAKSE'S WIDOW, LALITHA, A SPITFIRE AND A DEFINITELY LIBERATED WOMAN WHO HAD LITTLE USE FOR HER OFTER ESTRANGED HUSBAND'S POLITICLA AND ECONOMIC VIEWS AND MADE LITTLE SECRETS OF IT. ALTHOUGH FEW PEOPLE BELIEVE THE YOUNGER BROTHER HAS ANY CHANCE AS AN INDEPENDENT, HIS CANDIDACY COULD SIPHON OFF SOME SLFP VOTES MAKING THAT

PARTY'S TASK MORE DIFFICULT.
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